



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

BI-WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS

February 18-March 2, 2008

HIGHLIGHT

International Women's Day 2008, "Investing in Women and Shaping Progress":

International Women's Day on March 8 commemorates the struggles and honors the achievements of women around the world. To help support women in Afghanistan, the United States Congress, representing the American people, passed legislation to allocate \$75 million for programs that directly benefit the female population of Afghanistan. This investment improves health care, increases opportunities for education and economic development, and strengthens legal rights for the women of Afghanistan.



Journalist covering the opening of the Balkh Dairy Plant in Mazar-e-Sharif, September 2007.

PHOTO: USAID

Over the past seven years, Afghanistan has seen an increase in the empowerment of women as active members of their communities. The United States has helped facilitate the growth of nearly 200 democratically-elected Community Development Councils for women and supported the development of 180 female youth committees whose members engage in community development and service projects. Women make up 30% of the student body of the American University of Afghanistan, and 35% of the five million students enrolled in primary and secondary schools are girls. Through USAID programs, 76 female judges have been trained and given the tools necessary to officiate over the courts, manage cases, and provide due process in the courts, leading to more effective and transparent rule of law. Additionally, USAID has provided professional media training for 185 female journalists.

To improve the economic status of women, assistance from the American people helps Afghan women succeed in business – 39 women's enterprises participated at the Badakshan Agricultural Fair in October 2007, 185 women entrepreneurs collaborated to establish the Eastern Region Handicraft Center, and more than 500 widows have established home-based businesses throughout the country. USAID has fostered the growth of over 400 self-help savings and investment groups for women. The Afghan Women's Business Federation has 20,000 members nationwide who are learning to run businesses, market products, and improve the quality of their goods.



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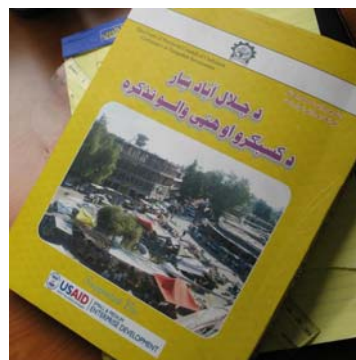
Rangina Hamidi of Kandahar Treasure, which received start-up funding from USAID, was named one of this year's recipients of the CNN Heroes award for her efforts in fighting for justice and advancing the cause of women's rights in Afghanistan. Kandahar Treasure is the largest woman-owned Kamak embroidery business in the country and employs 400 home-based embroiderers to support a rapidly growing international market of high-end women's clothing. According to Hamidi, "The other women and I dedicated to this project know that working is the only real alternative to insecurity...We women have taken it upon ourselves to stitch the future of peace for our children. Embroidery is the skill we have, and love and patience is what we can give to our families and our country. We will work to help rebuild this war-torn nation."

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Kabul Develops New Municipal Master Plan: With USAID assistance, the Kabul Municipality has developed a new Master Plan for Southwest Kabul. The Kabul Master Plan has not been revised since 1978 and has a major impact on land tenure, security, human well-being and the livelihoods of the residents of Kabul, a city which has seen a population growth of approximately three and one-half million since 1978. The plan lays out an improved public infrastructure and land usage scheme that will guarantee better access to public facilities for the vast majority of inhabitants, and the minimization of the number of informal parcels that can lead to forced evictions or household relocation. More information is available at: http://www.ltera.org/USAID_LTERA_LAND_TENURE.html#Master_Plan.

Business Directory Connects Vendors with Consumers:

On February 4, 2008, the National Union of Craftsmen and Classes, with USAID support, published the first Afghanistan Business Directory of Jalalabad City Businesses, based on the Yellow Pages model. This directory contains a listing of 10,700 businesses divided by classification. Of the 900 copies, 200 will be distributed at no cost to non-governmental and governmental organizations in Jalalabad. The remaining 700 will be sold for \$2 each. The directory will expand the cooperation between and opportunities for businesses in Jalalabad.



Jalalabad City Business
Directory

PHOTO: USAID

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Afghan Laws Searchable Online for First Time: On February 21, Afghanistan's laws were made available to the public when the Ministry of Justice launched its full-text searchable online database, <http://www.moj-research.gov.af>. For over three years, the Ministry of Justice, in conjunction with the USAID-funded Afghanistan Rule of Law Project, has collected, digitized, and uploaded more than 20,000



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pages of laws from the Official Gazette. The Official Gazette is Afghanistan's complete set of laws, regulations, decrees, and orders passed since 1964. Prior to the online database, these laws were available only by visiting a location that housed a hard copy of the 86-volume set or via DVDs.

1,300 Students Sit for 2008 Judicial Training Entrance Exam: On Friday, February 22, 1,300 graduates from *madrassas*, law faculties and Sharia faculties from all over Afghanistan were tested to become Afghanistan's next generation of judges. The entrance examination to the 2008 Stage Judicial Training Program—a Supreme Court-mandated, 36-week course for all future judges—was held at Kabul University with financial and technical assistance from USAID. Compared to last year's exam, more than double the number of students sat for the exam, an indication that more and more of Afghanistan's students are interested in judicial careers. Another important development for this year's Stage entrance exam includes new questions on constitutional and commercial law—drafted with USAID assistance—that better test applicants' understanding of these subjects and analytical capabilities. Once exam results are collected, the 200 highest-scoring applicants will be admitted as judicial candidates to the 2008 Stage Judicial Training Program.

AGRICULTURE AND ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Southern Chili Network Program Resumes as Rains Subside:

Work has returned to normal as a lull in the rain has allowed soil to dry. As a result, transportation of river sand to Bolan Farm for use in the 760 new chili seedbeds has resumed. The seedbeds will hold 40 million seedlings to satisfy requirements of 4,000 jeribs¹ of commercial chili production by contract farmers. At this point in time, USAID has identified almost 900 farmers who want to produce chili on 3,350 jeribs of land.



Chili seedbeds at the Bolan Farm.

PHOTO: USAID/Chemonics

Severe Weather Receives Rapid Response:

The severe winter continues to be of primary concern.

USAID's Office of Food for Peace made a rapid response to a request from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for additional food aid. Approximately 30,000 metric tons (\$20 million) of United States Government wheat are pre-positioned in World Food Program's (WFP) hubs in Quetta (11,000 metric tons) and Peshawar (19,000 metric tons) in response to WFP's appeal for 89,000 metric tons worth \$77 million. Dispatches from these hubs into

¹ Jerib is an Afghan unit of land measurement; one jerib equals one fifth of hectare.



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Afghanistan are taking place. As of mid February, 4,330 metric tons have been dispatched to Mazar, Jalalabad, and Faizabad.

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS

USAID Local Governance Program Successfully Supporting PRT Community

Development Objectives: On February 8, at the Commander Assessment Brief hosted at Bagram Air Base, the success of USAID's governance capacity building training for district governors was highlighted by Task Force Fury Commander, Colonel Schweitzer, as being "outstanding" from top to bottom with feedback from all participants being extremely positive. The local governance program improves the provincial population access to – and partnerships with – district, provincial and national governance entities and is implemented in both coalition- and ISAF-commanded PRTs.